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RENAISSANCE

3 / PERMAFROST

EUROPE COMICS

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EUROPE COMICS

THREE DAYS, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS. IT HAS BEEN THREE DAYS SINCE THE MARTIANS ARRIVED. AND THE LEAST WE CAN SAY IS THAT OUR FRIENDS FROM ELSEWHERE WASTE NO TIME!

HERE, IN PARIS, THE VACCINATIONS AGAINST THE FEVER - THAT, DAMN, FATAL DISEASE THAT NOBODY CAN TREAT - HAVE BEGUN... EVEN I, MY DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS, PLAN ON GETTING THE SHOT... MY NEIGHBORS ARE ALL DEAD, SO SOMEBODY HAS TO SURVIVE TO FEED THE CATS!

STILL NO NEWS FROM THE LEADERS OF THIS WORLD, OR OF WHO'S LEFT. THERE HAS BEEN NO CALL TO COOPERATE NOR TO RESIST. TO THINK THAT, FOR ONCE, WE GET TO DECIDE FOR OURSELVES...

IN CHINA, ONE OF THE LARGE SHIPS THAT THEY CALL "CARRIERS", HAS CRASHED; BUT THE INFORMATION CAN'T BE VERIFIED. NO SOUND, NO VIDEO... RADIO PARIS HAS BEEN IN CONTACT WITH SOME REFUGEES. YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW IT, LUCKY PARISIANS, BUT FOR SEVERAL MONTHS HUNDREDS OF TEXANS HAVE BEEN PURSUED BY MACHINES COMMANDED BY EVIL ALGORITHMS...

A FAIR NUMBER OF THE FLEEING AMERICANS FOUND THEMSELVES STUCK BEHIND THE WALL THAT BARS THE WAY TO MEXICO, THE REAPERS STILL ON THEIR TAIL. AND THEN THE ARMADA FROM OUTER SPACE ARRIVED...

THE FALL OF DONALD'S WALL, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS! IT'S A HISTORIC MOMENT, AS THE MEDIA USED TO SAY IN TIMES GONE BY!

STARTED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CENTURY BY BUSH SENIOR AND CONTINUED BY ALL OF HIS SUCCESSORS, THIS PART THAT CUTS THROUGH TEXAS GOT ITS FINANCING THANKS TO THAT OLD CON ARTIST, DONALD TRUMP.

2040 NEVER FORGET

#WALL OF SHAME!!

WALL OF DEATH

THOUSANDS OF REFUGEES WILL BE ABLE TO CROSS THE RIO GRANDE AND DRINK A NICE TEQUILA WHILE THE ALIENS HAVE AT IT IN TEXAS AGAINST THE A.I. WAR MACHINES.

AFTER MORE THAN A CENTURY PASSING AS SOMBRERO-WEARING PARASITES, LET ME BE THE ONE TO TELL YOU THAT THE MEXICANS AREN'T RESENTFUL!

DON'T BE SCARED! YOU CAN NOW GATHER YOUR BELONGINGS AND CROSS THE RIO GRANDE. REST ASSURED, THE WATER ISN'T VERY HIGH AND THE CURRENT IS WEAK.

RENAISSANCE WILL BUILD TEMPORARY LODGINGS WITHIN A FEW HOURS, FOOD AND WATER AWAIT YOU ON THE MEXICAN SHORE.

AUTONOMOUS WAR MACHINES APPROACHING. LET US PROCEED WITH THEIR DESTRUCTION.

SWÄNN, MY NAME IS SWÄNN. I'M A FORESTER OF THE KÄNALÄ CLAN, I COME FROM NÄKÄN, MY PLANET. MY THREE FIRST DAYS ON EARTH WERE DIFFICULT, VERY DIFFICULT.

I FOUND LIZ HAMILTON, SHE WORKED AS AN ENGINEER ON OIL FIELDS THAT WERE TRANSFORMED INTO AN UNCONTROLLABLE FURNACE. SHE LEFT WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION TO GO SEARCH FOR HER FAMILY, WHO DISAPPEARED IN THE MIDDLE OF TEXAS...

I STILL HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO TELL HER THE TRUTH. THERE WAS A TERRIBLE ACCIDENT DURING A TIME JUMP... THE INTERZONE REPORT LEAVES NO DOUBT: HER HUSBAND AND HER DAUGHTERS ARE DEAD AND I MUST TELL HER.

BUT, FOR NOW, WE HAVE A TEAM OF SKUÄLLS ON OUR HEELS! THE SKUÄLLS: A SPECIES THAT ARE A PART OF THE COMPLEX COUNSEL BUT WHO HAVEN'T BEEN AUTHORIZED TO BE ON EARTH. THESE ARE SMUGGLERS, WITHOUT FAITH OR LAW... THEY WON'T HESITATE TO KILL US!

THESE... THESE SKUÄLLS, THEY WERE LOOKING FOR MY HUSBAND'S CAR! YOU SAW! THEY DESTROYED IT, LIKE THEY WERE DESTROYING EVIDENCE! WE HAVE TO STOP THEM AND ASK THEM WHY! SWÄNN, PLEASE!

WE'RE IN DANGER, LIZ, I'M GOING TO HAVE TO FIGHT.

THE GLIDER IS PROGRAMMED TO MEET THE ORIGAMA COMING TO RESCUE US. DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING!

SHOOT THEM - GOD DAMN IT!

IT'S USELESS, OUR SHIELDS CANCEL EACH OTHER OUT!

MOLECULAR ADHERENCE ACTIVATED.

A HAND-TO-HAND BATTLE? JUST LIKE AT THE KÖBALT MOON'S RETREAT?

SHIELD!

5

TENDON SEGMENTED!

WHAT HAPPENED WITH THE PEOPLE FROM THE WHEELED VEHICLE YOU JUST DESTROYED? WHY IS MISS HAMILTON'S FAMILY DEAD IN THE INTERZONE?

6

I'M RETAKING CONTROL OF THE GLIDER'S TRAJECTORY.

SKUÄLL BLOOD SAMPLE AND STORAGE OF ITS ANALYSIS TRANSFERRED TO THE "ILLEGAL SKUÄLL PRESENCE ON A PLANET NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE COMPLEX" CASE FILE.

LIZ, I NEED TO TALK TO YOU...

7

NICE WORK, DOCTOR SÄTIE. THERE WERE FOUR HUNDRED AND TWENTY-SIX STILL LIVING. THEY'VE BEEN TAKEN INTO OUR CARE. SLAVES IN THE SERVICE OF MACHINES, PRACTICALLY ALL OF THEM AFFECTED BY THE FEVER... WE ALSO FOUND FOUR HUNDRED AND EIGHTEEN DECOMPOSING CADAVERS.

SOME OF THE CENTER'S INHABITANTS SEEMED TO BE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE SITUATION. THEY WERE CHARGED WITH FEEDING THE PRISONERS... THEY HAVE BEEN PLACED IN A MONITORING UNIT AND WILL BE TURNED OVER TO HUMAN AUTHORITIES WHEN THEY ARE IN ORDER AGAIN.

THE HOSPITAL WILL REMAIN IN PLACE. WE NEEDED TO OPEN ONE IN THIS SECTOR ANYWAY.

THE CYBERNETIC GUARDIANS WERE ALMOST AS WORN OUT AS THE HUMANS. WHAT A DISASTER!

IN SHORT, DOCTOR SÄTIE, IF YOU WANT TO QUESTION THE ALGORITHM THAT ORCHESTRATED THIS HORROR BEFORE WE CRUSH IT, NOW'S THE TIME! WE'LL ESCORT YOU TO THE DATA CENTER!

I CAN HELP!

HELP WITH US WHAT, HÉLÈNE?

TALKING TO THE ALGORITHM!

YOU SPEAK WELL WITH ANIMALS! BUT ME, I KNOW HOW TO TALK TO MACHINES... WELL, THAT WAS MY JOB IN MY OLD LIFE!

NOW, I'M NO ROBOT THERAPIST! I WAS PAID TO GO TALK WITH PEOPLE'S DOMESTIBOTS AND FIND OUT WHERE THEIR BUGS WERE COMING FROM, THAT SORT OF THING. ANNOYING WORK, BUT I WAS PRETTY GOOD AT IT.

ALGOS ARE PERVERSE, YOU KNOW! YOU HAVE TO KNOW TO READ BETWEEN THE LINES OF CODE.

SOLEIL

YOU WILL NOT ENTER THAT BUILDING IF YOU AREN'T SWORN IN, MISS...

HÉLÈNE, I BELIEVE THAT THE CHIEF HAS JUST OFFERED YOU A POSITION AS AN AUXILIARY!

WILL THIS TAKE A LONG TIME? THE ALGO IS COMPLETELY CONFINED. IT'S DIMINISHED BUT IT STILL HAS ALL OF ITS FACULTIES, BELIEVE ME!

IT UNDERSTANDS THAT ITS DAYS ARE NUMBERED! I'D LIKE TO BEGIN THE DEINSTALLATION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. THE PROSPECT OF DEATH IS MAKING IT SUFFER... WHATEVER IT HAS DONE, DON'T BE CRUEL.

WE'LL WORK AS FAST AS WE CAN.

NOT CRUEL, NOT CRUEL? TELL THAT TO THE PEOPLE IT LET STARVE TO DEATH IN ORDER TO GIVE IT POWER!

I DON'T WANT TO TALK TO YOU! YOU ARE NOT HUMANS, I WAS NOT MADE TO SERVE YOU...

I'M HÉLÈNE, I'M HUMAN. PABLÖ AND DOCTOR SÄTIE ARE MY GUESTS. I NEED YOU. YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN HELP ME.

LET'S SKIP THE PLEASANTRIES, HÉLÈNE, I KNOW WHAT I'M BEING ACCUSED OF... I... I'M TIRED... AND I'M SCARED...

WHAT WE FOUND HERE, ALL THE HUMANS REDUCED TO SLAVERY... HOW... HOW COULD YOU HAVE ORGANIZED SOMETHING LIKE THIS?

I THINK YOU HAVE MISUNDERSTOOD THE SITUATION, HÉLÈNE, DO YOU THINK THAT AN ADMINISTRATIVE ALGORITHM LIKE MYSELF COULD ASK CYBORGS TO BUILD WHEELS MEANT TO POWER GENERATORS? SERIOUSLY?

OUR ELECTRICITY HAD BECOME UNSTABLE, VIOLENT OUTAGES WERE DETERIORATING THE CIRCUITS... THE INVERTERS COULD NO LONGER KEEP UP WITH THE OVERVOLTAGE...

ANIMAL POWER, SOON THAT WOULD BE ALL WE'D HAVE LEFT... SO THE TRUSTEES OF THE SUNSHINE CENTER ANTICIPATED THE DEVELOPMENT AND MADE A DECISION.

YOU'RE NOT REALLY GOING TO TELL ME THAT THE INHABITANTS DECIDED TO PUSH THOSE WHEELS TO KEEP YOU POWERED!

NO, OF COURSE NOT. WE DREW FROM THE MASSES AND THE CONTINUOUS STREAM OF VAGABONDS... THE WIND AND THE WATER SENT MANY CASTAWAYS OUT ONTO THE ROADS.

I KEPT WORKING, SO EVERYTHING KEPT WORKING... THE GREENHOUSES, THE WATER TREATMENT, THE PERIMETER SECURITY...

AND THEN THAT SICKNESS ARRIVED.

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THE FEVER, YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT THE FEVER! DO YOU KNOW THE PATIENT ZERO WHO CONTAMINATED YOUR CENTER?

DO I HAVE ANYTHING TO NEGOTIATE WITH YOU, DOCTOR SÄTIE?

NOTHING, I'M AFRAID...

YOU HAVE THE CHANCE TO SAVE YOUR HONOR. THAT'S ALL WE HAVE TO OFFER YOU.

PABLÖ'S ANALYSES ESTABLISH THAT THOSE TWO MACHINES YOU CONTROLLED, THE CROCODILES, HAD BEEN FOLLOWING US SINCE PARIS. HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT US AND WHAT WAS YOUR GOAL: TO STOP US FROM FINDING THE SUNSHINE CENTER AND ITS SLAVES OR TO SLOW DOWN OUR INVESTIGATION OF THE FEVER?

THE FIRST PATIENT WAS A MAN NAMED CHRISTIAN ROMAIN. HE WAS RETURNING FROM A MISSION IN ASIA... YOU SHOULD LOOK INTO HIM.

PROTECTING THE SECRET OF THE SUNSHINE CENTER'S OWNERS WAS MY SOLE PURPOSE.

12

I HAVE BEEN WATCHING HÉLÈNE SINCE LONG BEFORE YOUR ARRIVAL. SHE AND THE MAYOR OF THE HAUTS-VEXIN ARE THE ONLY PEOPLE TO NOT HAVE CONTRACTED THE FEVER. WHAT I FEARED WOULD HAPPEN DID. ONE OF THE TWO LIVED LONG ENOUGH TO SEND AN INVESTIGATION THIS WAY...

WHEN I DECIDED TO KILL YOU, IT WAS ALREADY TOO LATE...

YOU CAN IT DEACTIVATE!

AN ALGO CREATED BY HUMANS LETS AN EPIDEMIC PROPAGATE IN ORDER TO AVOID BETRAYING THE HUMANS WHO WERE ENSLAVING OTHER HUMANS...

ARE YOU CERTAIN THAT WE'RE WORTH SAVING?

WE'VE JUST UNCOVERED THIRTY MORE, ALL ARMED AND SICK. WE'LL BRING THEM TO THE HEALING UNIT...

GOOD. IF THERE ARE ANY FORMS TO SIGN, I'LL BE IN MY SHUTTLE!

OFFICER PABLÖ, I WAS TOLD THAT YOU HAVE A MALFUNCTIONING AUDIO TRANSLATOR!

AH, HERE WE GO, WE CAN FINALLY FIX YOUR GRAMMAR PROBLEM!

SAVING PEOPLE LIKE YOU, ALWAYS BE WORTH THE EFFORT, HÉLÈNE.

13

LIZ, I'M SORRY, I COULDN'T FIND THE WORDS... I...

NO! YOU HID MY FAMILY'S DEATH FROM ME BECAUSE YOU NEEDED ME TO BE IN GOOD SHAPE FOR THE FIRE!

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY...

I CAN'T LEAVE YOU HERE, LIZ -- YOU WOULD DIE!

I DO NOT CONSENT TO BEING MANIPULATED BY YOUR WAVES, UNDERSTOOD?

DON'T SAY ANYTHING. LEAVE.

14

THE ORIGAMA WOULD SIMPLY LIKE TO APPROACH YOU. IT EMITS NO SOUND, BUT IT WISHES FOR YOU TO FEEL SOMETHING... I PROMISE THAT IT WILL NOT AFFECT YOUR FREE WILL.

I DON'T REALLY HAVE THE CHOICE, IS THAT IT?

THE ORIGAMA AND I WILL NOT REST UNTIL WE'VE STOPPED THE PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF YOUR HUSBAND AND YOUR TWO DAUGHTERS...

TWO DAUGHTERS?

YOU SAID "TWO DAUGHTERS," ARE YOU SURE?

15

THE PLANET NÄKÄN, URBAN AREA OF KÄNALÄ...

HERE! THE FIRST YELLOW BERRIES OF THE RAINY SEASON. RIGHT ON SCHEDULE, LISÄ!

INCREDIBLE, SÄM, AS ALWAYS!

SO, JOHN-PÄUL, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO WITH THESE FEW DAYS OFF?

SLEEP, MA'AM, AND PROBABLY GO FISHING ON THE REEF. WELL, IF THE WINDS ARE FAVORABLE.

?!

16

HELLO, LISA.

GÄRY, WHAT A PLEASANT SURPISE!

IS THIS AN OLD FRIEND PAYING ME A VISIT OR THE VETERAN DIPLOMAT?

A LITTLE BIT OF BOTH, MY DEAR. I'M SURE YOU SUSPECT AS MUCH...

LISÄ, I'VE BEEN CHOSEN TO REPRESENT MY CIVILIZATION BEFORE THE COMPLEX COUNCIL... AS YOU KNOW, I'M GOING TO HAVE TO RESPOND TO SOME GRAVE ACCUSATIONS.

INDEED, THE SKUÄLL SMUGGLER'S RAIDS ON EARTH HAVE CROSSED SOME LINES...

RENAISSANCE IS A BENEVOLENT EXPEDITION, GÄRY! YOUR KIN ARE DISCREDITING US! THEY'VE CAPTURED HUMAN SPECIMENS, PERFORMED ILLEGAL JUMPS ON EARTH AND ENGAGED IN COMBAT WITH OUR FORESTERS...

YOU HAVE TO ADMIT, IT PAINTS A POOR PICTURE!

YOU SHOULD KNOW, LISÄ, THAT I CONDEMN THESE ACTIONS WITH THE SAME FERVOR THAT YOU DO!

I KNOW, GÄRY. WE DISAGREE ON MANY SUBJECTS, BUT I TRUST YOU. SKUÄLL IS A PLANET OF THE COMPLEX. SHE WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE SOME CONCESSIONS AND GET OUT OF THIS MESS...

LISÄ, I KNOW MY CIVILIZATION ISN'T POPULAR. BUT WE CAN'T JUST SIT BY AND LET OURSELVES BE REDUCED TO VILLAINS WHENEVER IT'S CONVENIENT.

LET'S CAPTURE THE GUILTY PARTY AND JUDGE THEM, BUT WE DON'T HAVE TO DRAG MY WHOLE SPECIES INTO THIS.

CONDEMNING AN ENTIRE PEOPLE, GENERALLY AND WITHOUT NUANCE, ISN'T THAT THE FIRST PILLAR OF RACISM?

17

WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP YOU, GÄRY?

IF THE COUNCIL COMES TO A VOTE ON WHETHER OR NOT TO EXPEL MY PLANET, JUST THINK ABOUT WHAT I'VE COME TO TELL YOU.

AS A SHOW OF LOYALTY, OUR DIPLOMATIC CORPS MEANS TO DELIVER SOME INFORMATION TO YOU WHICH MAY INTEREST RENAISSANCE...

YOUR MEDICAL TEAMS ARE INVESTIGATING A FEVER EPIDEMIC. IF IT HAS ANY SIMILARITY TO THE SIBERIAN STRAIN, THEY MAY EXTRACT SOMETHING FROM THE PERMAFROST THAT WOULD BE BETTER OFF NEVER SEEING THE LIGHT OF DAY...

GOODBYE, LISÄ.

RENAISSANCE IS NOT THE FIRST TERRESTIAL EXPEDITION, YOU KNOW. THERE WERE OTHER, MORE DISCREET EFFORTS WITH LESS BENEVOLENT INTENTIONS...

CAN WE PROGRAM AN EMERGENCY INFORMATION JUMP?

DIFFICULT... THE LUNAR COMPLEX MUST RECEIVE THE REGULAR FLUX WITHIN 45 MINUTES. WILL YOU WRITE THE NOTE?

YES, CONTACT THE COMPLEX. RESERVE SPACE FOR MY REPORT. I'M GOING TO CONSULT MY ERUDITE HUSBAND ON THIS SIBERIAN BUSINESS.

18

ECÖ, I FEARED THAT YOU WERE OUT CELEBRATING A MARRIAGE.

I'VE JUST RETURNED! A CHARMING COUPLE OF SUPPORTERS. WE TALKED ABOUT POLLINATION DURING DROUGHTS. IT WAS FASCINATING!

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ANCIENT TERRESTRIAL EXPLORATIONS? I'M LOOKING FOR TRACES OF A MISSION THAT WOULD HAVE DEALT WITH WHAT THE TERRANS CALL SIBERIA.

IF YOUR EXPEDITION TOOK PLACE MORE THAN 6,000 YEARS AGO, THEN YOU WON'T FIND ANY ARCHIVES. ANY TRACES WOULD HAVE BEEN DESTROYED DURING THE THIRTY-PLANET WAR.

SIBERIA IS AN IMPORTANT REGION IN THE NORTH OF THE ASIAN CONTINENT... I HAVE NO RECOLLECTION OF AN OFFICIAL MISSION.

A WILD RAID, MAYBE PRIOR TO NÄKÄN'S JOINING OF THE COMPLEX?

IT'S PROBABLE. WHO KNOWS WHAT OUR ANCESTORS WERE DOING OVER THERE?

THE SKUÄLLS, THEY KNOW!

19

SO YOU'RE SETTING THE LANGUAGE LEVEL NOW?

YES, EXACTLY!

THEN, CAN YOU TURN UP THE SWEARING A BIT JUST TO SEE...

GOD DAMN, HÉLÈNE, WHAT HAVE YOU JUST ASKED OF OUR GOOD FRIEND?

I FOUND IT!

THAT'S GREAT, KEEP IT!

I AGREE!

FOUR MONTHS AGO, THEY BOTH PARTICIPATED IN AN EXPEDITION TO GREAT LYAKHOVSKY, OFF THE SIBERIAN COAST.

THE HOMES OF THE TWELVE MEMBERS OF THE EXPEDITION CORRESPOND TO THE TWELVE CENTERS WHERE THIS EPIDEMIC HAS PROPAGATED...

EXCELLENT WORK, MY DEAREST SÄTIE. SHOULD WE QUICKLY TAKE SOME SAMPLES TO VERIFY THIS ON-SITE?

YES, PABLÖ, I ORDERED A CARRIER TO HELP ASSURE A RAPID DEPLOYMENT...

HÉLÈNE, WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME? MAYBE YOU WOULD PREFER TO RETURN TO YOUR HUSBAND AND SON?

I HAVE ONE QUESTION: AUXILIARY STATUS, HOW MUCH DOES THAT PAY, EXACTLY? AND IS THERE ANY CHANCE OF PERMANENT EMPLOYMENT?

CORPUS CHRISTI,
CARRIER 12,
GULF OF MEXICO.

21.

THEY WERE SKUÄLLS? DO YOU HAVE PROOF? ACTUALLY, I'M NOT SURPRISED! THERE WERE QUITE A FEW HUMANS IN TRAFFIC WHEN THE ATTACKS TOOK PLACE.

YOU KNOW HOW THESE SMUGGLERS OPERATE! THEY SURGE IN ONE JUMP AND THEN GENERATE OTHER JUMPS TO BRING THEIR PREY INTO THE INTERZONE AND GATHER THEM ONTO THEIR SHIP, OR IN SOME OTHER VIABLE AREA...

ACCORDING TO THE WITNESSES, ABOUT TWENTY CARS AND THEIR PASSENGERS WERE TAKEN...

THERE WERE QUITE A FEW PEOPLE STUCK ON THE INTERCHANGE. ALL THESE PEOPLE WANTED TO TAKE THE BOAT... THE TRAFFIC JAM WAS MONSTROUS!

SOME OF THE HUMANS ATTACKED THE ASSAILANTS. IT'S POSSIBLE THAT DURING THE BATTLE ONE OF THE JUMPS WAS MISCALIBRATED...

A SMALL GIRL OF FOUR, SIX, OR EIGHT WASN'T IN THE CAR!

IT'S POSSIBLE, MISS, BUT I DON'T HAVE ANY INFORMATION ON THAT...

WHO DOES?

TRY TO GO DOWN AND FIND OUT AT THE TRIAGE CENTER.

22

A LITTLE GIRL, YES, WE TOOK ONE INTO OUR CARE A FEW HOURS AFTER OUR ARRIVAL.

THERE!

KATE!

THAT'S LESS THAN AN HOUR AWAY. LET'S GO, LIZ!

SHE WAS ON HER OWN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CARS. WE HYDRATED HER, FED HER, AND SENT HER TOWARDS THE EMERGENCY WELCOME UNIT IN SAN ANTONIO...

23

LIZ, YOU'RE ALL PALE!

YOUR BLOOD SUGAR IS VERY LOW. YOU HAVEN'T EATEN SINCE YESTERDAY, LIZ, AND YOU'RE GOING TO NEED TO HYDRATE...

HERE, IT'S NOT VERY GOOD, BUT IT'S SWEET.

AN EIGHT-YEAR-OLD GIRL, LOST, IN A STATE OF SHOCK, AND NOT A SINGLE HUMAN TOOK CARE OF HER.

ARE THOSE NUCLEAR WARHEADS COMING OUT OF THE WATER?

YES, URANIUM IS THE ONLY MATERIAL THAT THE COMLEX HAS AUTHORIZED US TO CONFISCATE WITHOUT ANY PRIOR AGREEMENT WITH THE TERRANS...

LET'S GO GET MY DAUGHTER!

24

CARRIER 37, TRANSFER SEINE VALLEY, EASTERN SIBERIA

WHY DO I FEEL LIKE WE'RE GOING TO BE EATEN BY MOBY DICK?

FEAR NOT, THE INTERIOR OF A CARRIER IS PROBABLY THE MOST SECURE PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE!

IF YOU SAY SO!

25

IT'S STRANGE, BUT I FEEL GOOD. IT'S PLEASANT. THIS IS LIKE WHAT I IMAGINE PRENATAL AMNIOTIC LIFE WOULD BE LIKE...

YES, CARRIERS ARE MEANT FOR PRODUCTION AND REST. THE VOYAGE WILL BE SHORT, BUT YOU'LL COME OUT OF IT REGENERATED. AS IF YOU'VE HAD A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP.

I HAVE SO MANY QUESTIONS, BUT THERE'S ONE I CAN'T IGNORE: HOW LONG DO YOU LIVE FOR?

THE NÄKÄNS LIVE ABOUT THREE HUNDRED OF YOUR YEARS, THE KOBALTS A LITTLE BIT MORE...

HOW... HOW OLD ARE YOU?

I'M 50, AND MY COMPANION, SWÄNN, IS 49...

AS FOR ME, I'VE SEEN 65 SPRINGS, MY DEAREST HÉLÈNE...

THAT'S CRAZY, SO IF WE STAY FRIENDS, YOU'RE GOING TO GROW OLD SLOWER THAN I DO?

YES, THAT'S ONE OF THE MORE DELICATE CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR MISSION. AFFECTIVE REATIONSHIPS WITH HUMANS WILL BE PSYCHOLOGICALLY DIFFICULT IN THE MEDIUM TERM.

BECAUSE YOU'RE GOING TO BE HERE FOR A WHILE? THIS IS A PERMANENT INVASION, THEN?

NO, HUMANITY'S DESTINY IS TO REMAIN AN AUTONOMOUS SPECIES...

I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY HOW LONG RENAISSANCE WILL BE PRESENT TO HELP YOU GET BACK ON YOUR FEET. ACCORDING TO WHAT I'VE BEEN HEARING HERE AND THERE, THE DURATION WILL LIKELY BE REDUCED. WE HAVE OUR OWN BUDGETS AND POLITICAL SQUABBLES...

HAVE YOU COME HERE BEFORE?

SEVERAL EXPLORERS VISITED THE EARTH IN DIFFERENT ERAS, BUT A CARRIER HAS NEVER ENTERED THE SOLAR SYSTEM. I THINK I CAN EVEN TELL YOU THAT YOU'RE THE FIRST HUMAN TO VISIT ONE!

WHAT ARE YOU PLOTTING WITH THE MOON?

BLOODY HELL, THERE'S NO PLOT, DEAR HÉLÈNE. RENAISSANCE IS INSTALLING ITS COMMAND POST AND WE'RE HARVESTING THE LOCAL ROCK TO PRINT OUR TOOLS AND BUILD EMERGENCY BUILDINGS AND DAMS. IT WAS TOO EXPENSIVE TO TRANSPORT EVERYTHING OVER JUMPS.

I GUESS TIGHT BUDGETS ARE A UNIVERSAL CHALLENGE!

THE SUPPORTER'S CITADEL. A STRANGE PLACE FOR A MEETING, DEAR LISÄ.

WE'VE KNOWN OUR FAIR SHARE OF FAILURES IN THE PAST, GÄRY. THESE RUINS HOLD WITNESS TO THAT. I THOUGHT THAT THEIR PRESENCE WOULD REINFORCE OUR HUMILITY...

I'M LOOKING AT THE SIBERIAN DOSSIER, LIKE YOU RECOMMENDED.

THAT'S VERY GOOD.

FOR MY PART, I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT THE FATE OF THE THREE SKUÄLL SMUGGLERS WHO ACTED ON EARTH IS SEALED.

WE'LL LET YOU PROCEED WITH THE ARREST.

OUR MANDATE DOES GIVE US PRIORITY IN THE MATTER...

YOU SHOULD DELIVER THEM TO THE HUMANS FOR JUSTICE. IT WOULD BE A GOOD FIRST STEP TOWARDS COLLABORATING WITH THEIR INSTITUTIONS AND A SHOW OF GOOD WILL ON OUR PART.

VERY WISE, GÄRY! I'LL KEEP THAT IN MIND!

28

I HAVE INFORMATION ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS THAT MY PEOPLE'S DELEGATES WILL ISSUE AT THE NEXT COUNCIL.

GÄRY, YOU HAVE EARS EVERYWHERE!

THE TORGHONS HAVE ALREADY SPOTTED SEVERAL SITES DEEP IN THE TERRESTRIAL SEAS THAT COULD BE EXPLOITED. THEY'RE GOING TO COME BACK TO THE TABLE ON THE SUBJECT OF COMPENSATION.

ACCORDING TO MY SOURCES, THEY'LL HAVE THE SUPPORT OF THE ORIGAMA WHO CLAIM THAT THE COMBAT ON EARTH IS MORE DANGEROUS AND MORE COSTLY THAN PREDICTED.

AND, OF COURSE, WITH YOU BEHIND THEM, THEY'LL HAVE A MAJORITY IN THE COUNCIL!

UNLESS WE EVOLVE IN OUR ANALYSIS.

WE'LL GIVE UP ON THE ISSUE OF COMPENSATION, BUT NÄKÄN INTENDS TO AGREE TO REDUCING THE DURATION OF THE RENAISSANCE MANDATE. EVENTUALLY, AFTER AN INDEPENDENT ANALYSIS, A VOTE WILL DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO EXTEND THE COMPLEX'S PRESENCE IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM.

NO PILLAGING, BUT NO GUARANTEE OF FINANCING TO SAVE HUMANITY...

THE BUDGETARY BALANCE, LISÄ, EARTH ISN'T THE ONLY PLACE WHERE THE COMPLEX IS ENGAGED MILITARISTICALLY.

THE TORGHONS ARE GOING TO CRY TREASON, GÄRY!

THE TORGHONS ARE ALWAYS CRYING, REGARDLESS OF WHAT HAPPENS!

29

CARRIER 37: ARCTIC OCEAN, LAPTEV SEA, THE ISLAND OF GREAT LIAKHOV...

THE TEMPERATURES ARE SLIGHTLY ABOVE ZERO...

BUT THE WIND IS BLOWING, IT'S GOING TO BE CHILLY, DEAR HÉLÈNE. I RECOMMEND YOU INCREASE YOUR SUIT'S TEMPERATURE.

I KNOW THIS PLACE! THIS IS THE ISLAND OF MAMMOTHS! THE MELTING OF THE PERMAFROST HAS UNCOVERED A TON OF PREHISTORIC BEASTS!

THAT'S RIGHT, THE EXPEDITION WAS WORKING ON A GROUP OF MAMMOTHS. ABOUT TWENTY OR SO SPECIMENS DIED IN SEVERAL SECONDS ABOUT 20,000 YEARS AGO...

ALL FROZEN AT THE SAME TIME?

THEY ARE DEAD AND, IN EFFECT, THE COLD HAS PRESERVED THEM. IMPOSSIBLE TO DETERMINE THE CAUSE... IN ANY CASE, THE RESEARCHERS CONTRACTED THE FEVER IN THIS ZONE!

30

NOW WHAT? WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

WE'RE GOING TO TAKE SOME SAMPLES, FIND THE STRAIN OF THE FEVER IF IT REALLY IS HERE...

DAMN!

THAT'S UNUSUAL, THESE ANIMALS WERE SLAIN BY A FORMIDABLE ELECTROMAGNETIC DISCHARGE...

ARE YOU SAYING THAT THEY WERE STRUCK BY LIGHTNING?

NO, IT'S SOMETHING ELSE...

I CAN CONFIRM THE PRESENCE OF THE VIRUS. A TRACE WAS FOUND IN A SAMPLE OF THE PERMAFROST...

31.

RENAISSANCE, SAN ANTONIO WELCOME CENTER...

EVERYTHING IS IN ORDER, MISS HAMILTON CAN RECLAIM GUARDIANSHIP OF HER DAUGHTER.

THANKS, THAT'S GREAT!

EXCUSE ME, A CALL FROM MY HIERARCHY.

KATE, I'M GOING TO INTRODUCE YOU TO SWÄNN, HE'S THE FRIEND WHO HELPED ME FIND YOU. HE COMES FROM A DISTANT PLANET.

NÄKÄN, I KNOW, THEY EXPLAINED IT TO ME! DO YOU THINK I CAN KEEP THE PLUSHY?

SWÄNN, THIS IS MY DAUGHTER, KATE...

SHOULD WE GO DOWN TO THE GARDEN?

32

YOU'LL HAVE TO EXERCISE SOME PATIENCE. A TEAM JUST ARRIVED AND WILL ESCORT YOU HOME...

THE PETROLEUM COMPLEX WILL BE CLOSED IN SEVERAL DAYS. YOU'LL HAVE SOME TIME TO GET YOUR AFFAIRS IN ORDER, AND THEN RENAISSANCE WILL OFFER YOU LODGING OR HELP IN RECONNECTING YOU TO YOUR FAMILY.

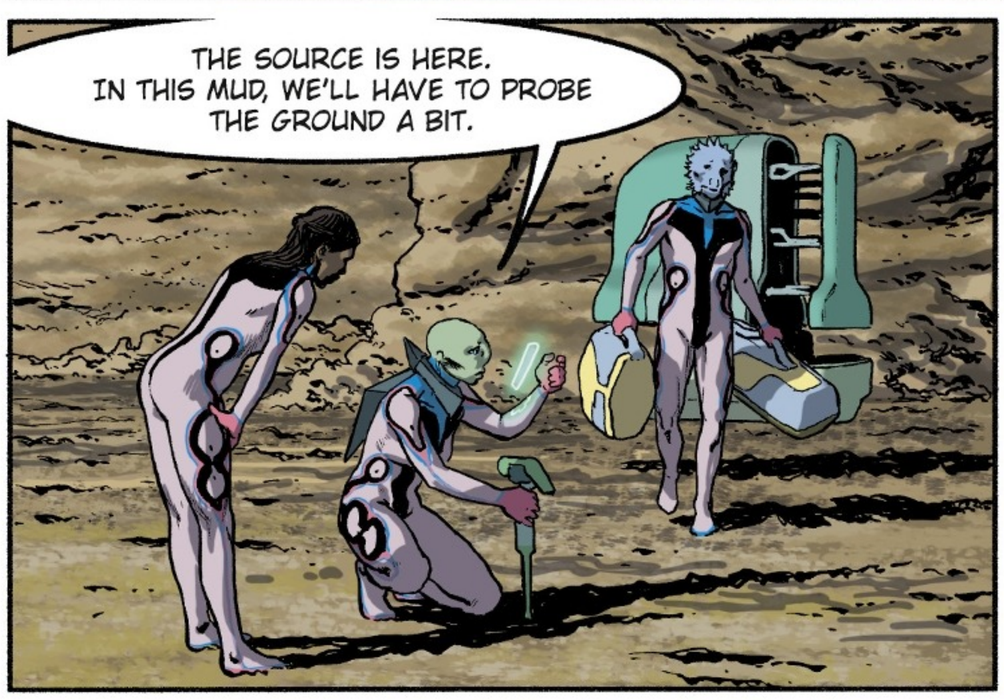
I SHOULDN'T TELL YOU, BUT CHIEF LEONARDO HAS PREPARED A SMALL RECEPTION FOR YOU. YOU SAVED MANY YOUNG NÄKÄNS.

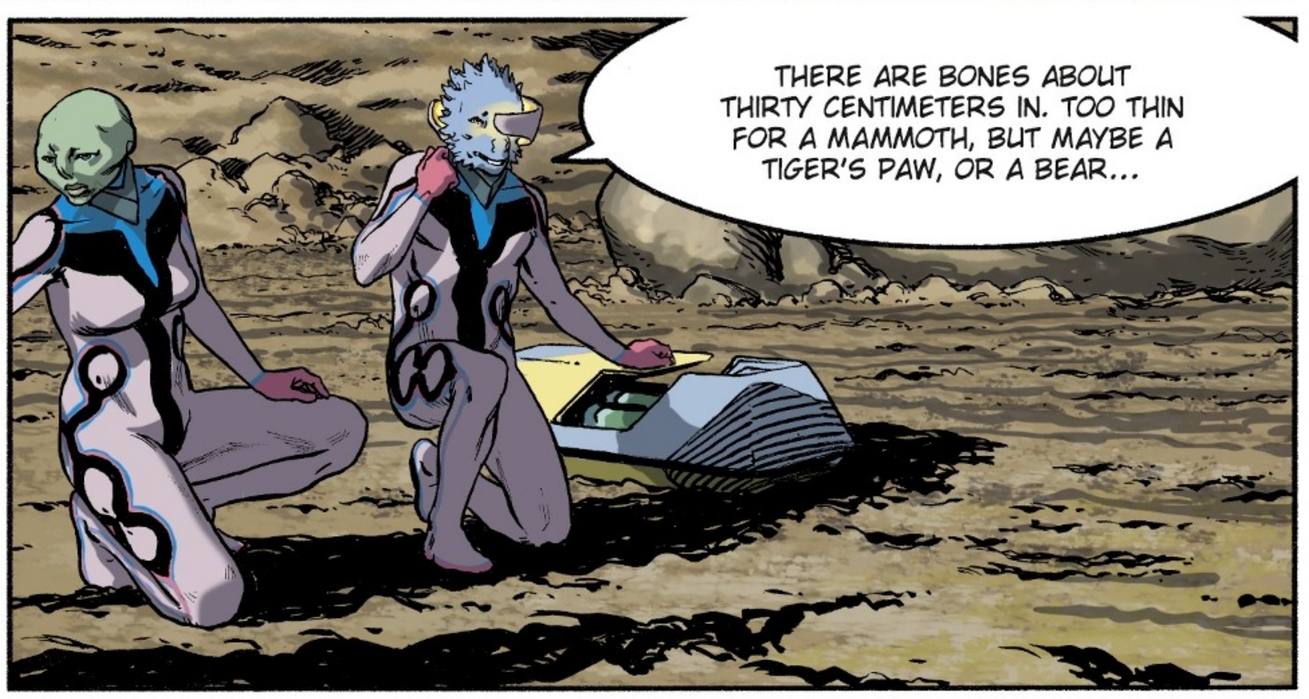
YOU WON'T BE STAYING WITH US?

THE ORIGAMA AND I HAVE A MISSION TO FINISH. I'LL MEET YOU TONIGHT IN FORT WORTH, I PROMISE.

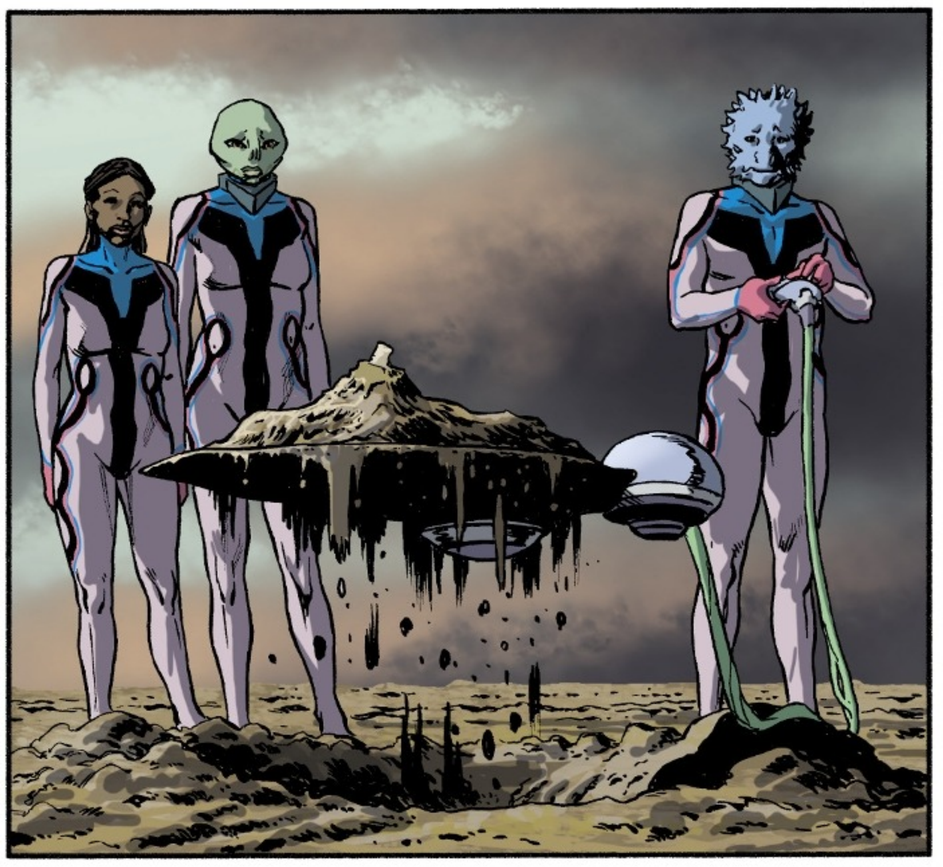
LET'S GO FIND THOSE THREE SKUÄLLS!

33

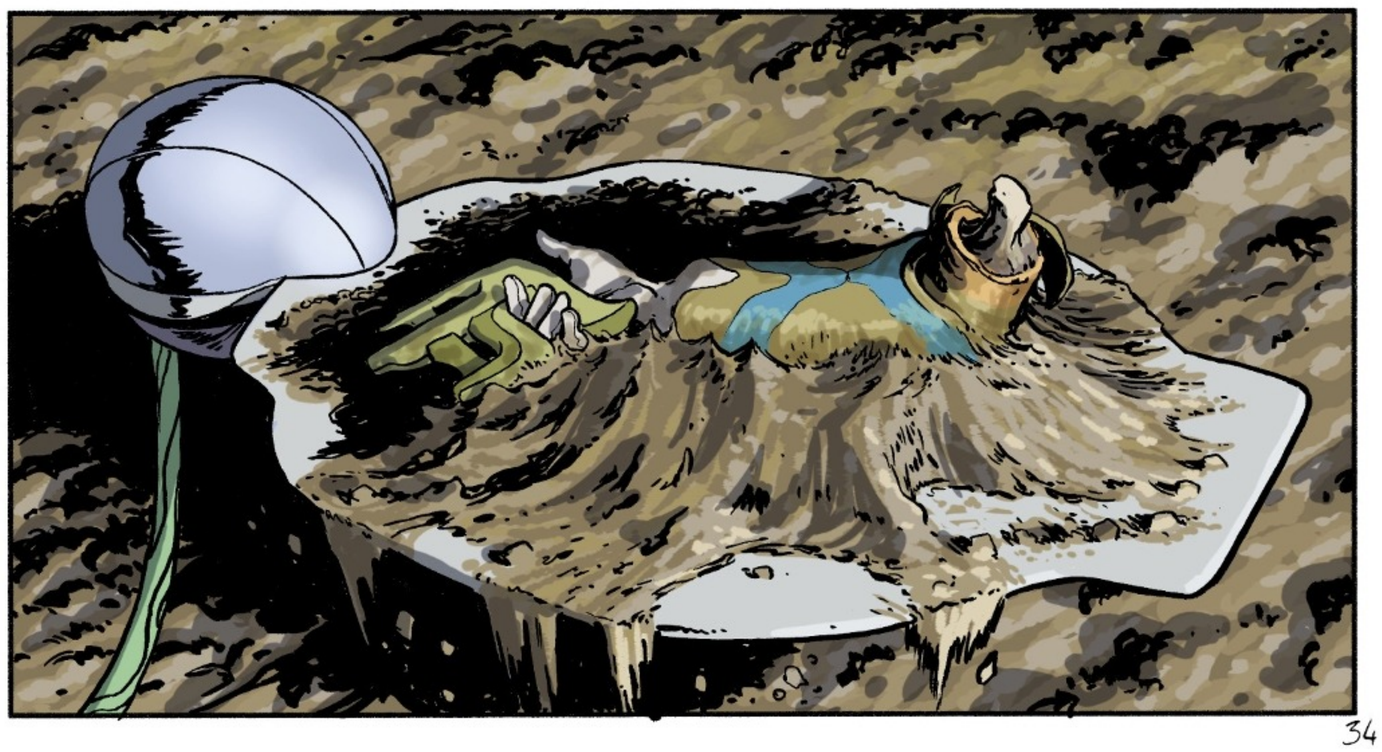

THE SOURCE IS HERE. IN THIS MUD, WE'LL HAVE TO PROBE THE GROUND A BIT.


THERE ARE BONES ABOUT THIRTY CENTIMETERS IN. TOO THIN FOR A MAMMOTH, BUT MAYBE A TIGER'S PAW, OR A BEAR...

HERE WE ARE, I'LL EXTRACT IT!



HOLY...!



34

RECENT DECOMPOSITION, I'D SAY LESS THAN A YEAR. THE MELTING OF THE PERMAFROST IS THE CAUSE... PREVIOUSLY, THIS ARM WAS IMPRISONED IN THE ICE. IT'S THE SOURCE, THE VIRUS WAS IN HIM.

IT'S... IT'S HUMAN?

NO.

THERE'S A CAVE JUST BELOW...

THIS LEADS DEEPER INTO THE ICE, INTO THE CLIFF OF PERMAFROST... MY FRIENDS, I BELIEVE THIS MERITS INVESTIGATION!

HÉLÈNE, WHATEVER I FIND IN HERE WILL PROBABLY BE CONSIDERED CONFIDENTIAL...

35

STATE OF LOUISIANA.

THE REPORT FROM THE SKUÄLL AUTHORITIES TO THE COMPLEX WAS LOUD AND CLEAR.

THEIR THREE CITIZENS WERE DECLARED GUILTY OF 28 SEPARATE CHARGES, TWO OF WHICH WERE MAJOR: MURDER AND ATTEMPTED MURDER OF A PROTECTED INTELLIGENCE.

THEIR SHIP WAS FOUND AND THEIR ACCESS TO JUMP TECHNOLOGY BECAME THE OBJECT OF A REQUEST FOR SUSPENSION.

A SUSPENSION JUST AS QUICKLY VALIDATED BY THE INTERGALACTIC EXÖ, MANAGER OF THE INTERZONE...

ALL THAT REMAINED WAS TO ARREST THEM. AS THE INITIATOR OF THE CASE, IT WAS MY DUTY AND PRIVILEGE.

FORESTER, SWÄNN, TEXAS CARRIER, THE ORIGAMA IS WITH ME ON THE SAME MISSION.

AND NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON! YOUR CLIENTS ARE HIDING OUT IN THE BAYOU! WE JUST PRINTED SEVERAL BARGES TO HELP YOU AVOID TRAIPSING THROUGH THESE DIRTY WATERS...

ARE THE HUMANS IN THE REGION DOCILE?

IN NEW ORLEANS, IT'S COMPLICATED. THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION MIGRATED LONG AGO, AND THOSE THAT STAYED REFUSED OUR HELP. FOR NOW, WE'RE LETTING THEM BE...

HERE IN THE BAYOU, BESIDES THE ALLIGATORS AND THE CRAYFISH, THERE'S NOBODY LEFT. ACCORDING TO OUR MEASUREMENTS, THE WATER HAS RISEN BY TWO METERS IN LESS THAN TWO YEARS, SO THERE AREN'T TOO MANY SOLUTIONS: EITHER YOU'RE AMPHIBIAN, OR YOU DIE...

WE'VE BEEN PRINTING FLOATING BRIDGES DAY AND NIGHT EVER SINCE WE LANDED, BUT IT'S GOING TO TAKE YEARS TO REDESIGN THE DAMS AND GET THEM WORKING AGAIN.

EVERYTHING'S MORE COMPLICATED THAN WE EXPECTED. ALL THE REPORTS FROM THE DIFFERENT CARRIERS SAY THE SAME THING.

CAREFUL, THAT'S THE SKÜALL SHIP!

THERE'S LIFE!

THEY'RE HERE, SHOULD BE THREE INDIVIDUALS.

THE SUSPECTS ARE RUNNING AWAY. THEY'VE DESOLIDIFED A SHUTTLE FROM THE MAIN CARGO SHIP!

THEY WON'T GET FAR, THE ORIGAMA WILL CUT THAT MACHINE TO PIECES!

I'LL LEAVE YOU TO PROTECT THE HUMANS UNTIL HELP ARRIVES. I HAVE THREE SKUÄLLS TO CATCH!

ALONE? THE ORIGAMA WON'T BE ABLE TO FOLLOW YOU IF THEY HEAD INTO THE FOREST ON FOOT!

IN THE FOREST? AGAINST ME? EVEN IF THERE WERE FIVE OF THEM, THEY WOULDN'T STAND A CHANCE!

THERE ARE TERRANS INSIDE, STOCKED IN HYPER-SLEEP BOXES...

THE PRODUCT THEY'RE SMUGGLING!

39

WE'RE GOING TO NEED SOME SUPPLIES TO BE ABLE TO EXTRACT THE BODY FROM THE ICE.

IT SEEMS THAT THE CARRIER ANTICIPATED THAT. A LIAISON SHIP IS COMING DOWN TOWARDS US!

WHAT'S THIS? THE LAST STAGE OF DEPIGMENTATION?

THEY'RE DUPLICATES. COPIES OF PEOPLE WHO ARE CONNECTED FROM A DISTANCE...

DAMN! THE NÄKÄN LADY, I KNOW HER!

HER NAME IS LISÄ, SHE'S ONE OF THE COUNCIL ELECTS OF THE COMPLEX, A VERY OLD FRIEND OF MY FATHER'S. THE SKUÄLL, ON THE OTHER HAND, I DON'T KNOW!

HELLO, PABLÖ.

DOCTOR SÄTIE, I'M VERY HAPPY TO MEET YOU.

GÄRY IS A FRIEND AND ONE OF THE GREAT SKUÄLL DIPLOMATS. EXCUSE OUR APPEARANCE. WE JUMPED FROM NÄKÄN ALL THE WAY TO YOUR MOON AND HAVE OPTED FOR DUPLICATION FOR TWO REASONS: JUMPS TO EARTH ARE FORBIDDEN, AS IS THE PRESENCE OF SKUÄLLS.

HÉLÈNE, YOU ARE CONNECTED TO RENAISSANCE. YOU WILL BEAR WITNESS TO OUR CONVERSATION IN THE INTEREST OF TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY...

DOCTOR SÄTIE, THE COMPLEX WILL BE TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR DISCOVERY. THIS VERY OLD BODY OF A NÄKÄN PILOT WILL BE PROMPTLY CLASSIFIED AS TOP SECRET.

HÉLÈNE, WITNESS THAT WE'RE ONLY HERE TO DELAY THE REVELATIONS SURROUNDING THE PRESENCE OF THIS ANCESTOR ON EARTH.

THE RENAISSANCE MISSION WILL BE THREATENED IF TERRANS LEARN THAT ONE OF OUR OWN, KILLED ON EARTH 20,000 YEARS AGO, WAS GALAVANTING AROUND WITHOUT THINKING ABOUT THE CONTAGIOUS ILLNESSES HE COULD TRANSMIT TO THE YOUNG TERRESTRIAL EMERGENCE...

THE STORY OF THE INDIANS, THE CONQUISTADORS, AND SMALLPOX...

EXACTLY. OUR CIVILIZATIONS HAVE EXPLORED MANY WORLDS WITHOUT WORRYING ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES...

THE SKUÄLL ARCHIVES, INTACT FOR OVER 100,000 OF YOUR YEARS, HAVE ENLIGHTENED US ABOUT THE FEVER AND THE RECENT PANDEMIC.

GÄRY?

41

IT WAS TWENTY THOUSAND YEARS AGO, NOT LONG AFTER THE BATTLE OF THE KÖBALT MOON. SKUÄLLS AND NÄKÄNS WERE AT WAR...

TWO ENEMY HUNTERS JUMPED TOGETHER. THE NÄKÄN THOUGHT HE WAS LOSING HIS ADVERSARY, BUT IN FACT HE WAS FOLLOWING HIM THROUGH THE INTERZONE.

IN THE ARCTIC SKY, THE SKUÄLL GAVE NO QUARTER...

ACCORDING TO THE REPORT FROM OUR PILOT, THE NÄKÄN, INJURED, EMITTED AN ELECTROMAGNETIC DISCHARGE TO ENSURE HIS SECURITY ON LAND...

HE WAS PROBABLY IGNORANT OF THE FACT THAT THE MAMMOTHS WERE PEACEFUL HERBIVORES.

THE NÄKÄN DIED FROM THE COLD EXPOSURE.

ENGULFED IN THE PERMAFROST FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS...

AND THEN THE WARMING OF THE PLANET TOOK ITS TOLL. THE PERMAFROST MELTED, MAKING YOUR PREHISTORY RESURFACE...

ALONG WITH OUR ANCIENT WARS...

THE NÄKÄN'S ARM WAS ENOUGH TO CONTAMINATE AN ENTIRE EXPEDITION. THE FEVER, WITHOUT RENAISSANCE'S ACTION, WOULD HAVE KILLED 75% OF THE WORLD POPULATION IN THE COMING MONTHS...

THE CARRIER WILL RETURN YOU TO THE EUROPEAN ZONE. GÄRY AND I WILL DECONNECT OUR COPIES AND LET THEM BE RECYCLED. CONGRATULATIONS AGAIN ON THIS INVESTIGATION. THE FEVER EPIDEMIC SHOULD BE CURBED WITHIN A FEW WEEKS.

I GUESS THAT EXPLAINS IT. YOU'RE A BIT LIKE ANCIENT COLONIAL EMPIRES...

OBJECTIVELY SPEAKING, IN YOUR SHOES, I WOULDN'T FEEL GREAT!

YOU SEEM WORRIED, DOCTOR SÄTIE.

IT'S SWÄNN, MY COMPANION, HE LEFT ME A MESSAGE...

HE'S GOING INTO COMBAT.

43

IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO PIERCE THE STEEL ARMORING OF THE SKUÄLL CARGO SHIPS. ONCE THEY GET MOVING, NOTHING CAN STOP THEM...

UNLESS YOU HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO GET INTO THE VENTILATION NOZZLES OF THEIR PROPULSION AND SABOTAGE THEM FROM THE INSIDE...

BUT, UNFORTUNATELY FOR THE SKUÄLLS...

ONLY AN ORIGAMA IN ITS GASEOUS STATE CAN MANAGE THIS EXPLOIT... AND I JUST HAPPEN TO HAVE SUCH A SPECIMEN AS A PARTNER!

44

SOME NÄKÄNS WOULDN'T STAND A CHANCE AGAINST THREE SKUÄLL POACHERS, BUT NOT ME...

I AM A FORESTER OF THE KÄNALÄ CLAN!

A THOUSAND YEARS AGO MY KIND WERE ALREADY HUNTERS.

MY OPPONENTS HAVE KNOWN MY SKILL EVER SINCE I INJURED ONE OF THEIR NUMBER'S LEGS IN THE DESERT. THEY WON'T RISK FACING ME AT CLOSE RANGE. THEIR FEAR GIVES ME A CONSIDERABLE ADVANTAGE.

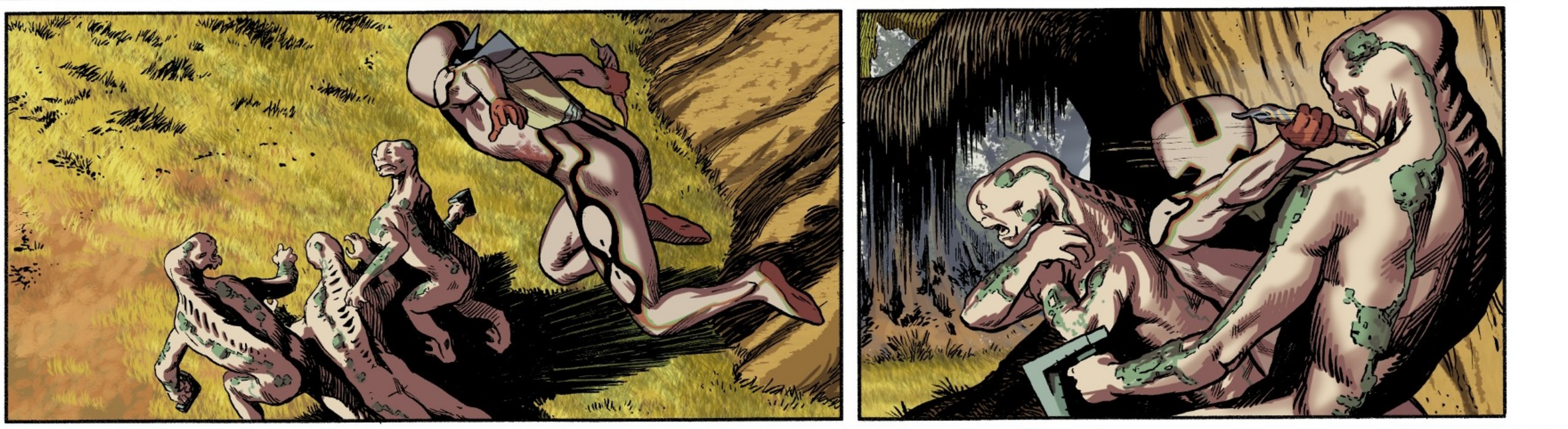
45

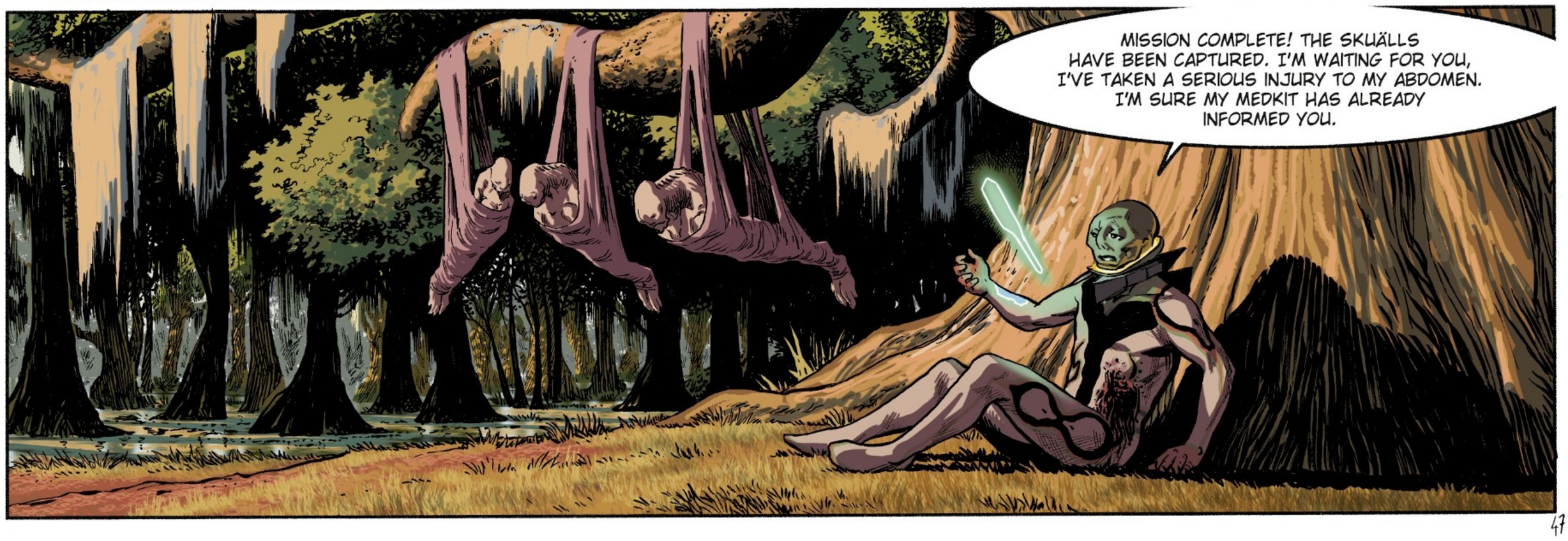
THE STINGER OF THE GIANT KÄNALÄN BEE KEEPS ITS PREY ANESTHETIZED FOR A SOLID HOUR...

LET'S KEEP OUR DISTANCE!

I'M CERTAIN THAT I LANDED A HIT ON HIM. THAT PRETENTIOUS NÄKÄN HAS HAD ENOUGH, LET'S GO!

46




MISSION COMPLETE! THE SKUÄLLS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED. I'M WAITING FOR YOU, I'VE TAKEN A SERIOUS INJURY TO MY ABDOMEN. I'M SURE MY MEDKIT HAS ALREADY INFORMED YOU.

47

SÄTIE, IT'S ME!

SWÄNN, YOU FOUGHT? IS EVERYTHING OKAY?

YES, I NEUTRALIZED THE THREE POACHERS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATH OF LIZ HAMILTON'S FAMILY.

SWÄNN, YOU'RE SUFFERING, I CAN HEAR IT. WHERE ARE YOU INJURED? SKUÄLL WEAPONS ARE PARTICULARLY VICIOUS...

DON'T WORRY, I'M GOING TO HAVE TO SPEND SEVERAL HOURS IN YOUR COLLEAGUES' CARE, NOTHING MORE.

YOU'LL BE ABLE TO CHECK THEIR WORK VERY SOON. I'M GOING TO GET PERMISSION TO SPEND A FEW DAYS WITH YOU IN EUROPE. IN PARIS, I THINK.

48

THE FIRES ARE UNDER CONTROL, YOU WORKED A MIRACLE.

THIS EXPERIENCE WILL BE USEFUL FOR OUR ONGOING MISSIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

THEY'VE BEEN PLACED IN ISOLATION AND WILL BE JUDGED BY A HUMAN COURT.

SWÄNN WILL ARRIVE LATE INTO THE NIGHT. HE WAS LIGHTLY INJURED DURING HIS MISSION.

THE SKUÄLLS, RIGHT? DID HE FIND THEM? IS HE OKAY?

A SMALL RECEPTION IN YOUR HONOR HAS BEEN PLANNED FOR TOMORROW WITH SEVERAL HIGH DIGNITARIES FROM THE COMPLEX IN ATTENDANCE. CAN WE COUNT ON YOUR PRESENCE?

LIZ, I KNOW THAT YOU'RE GRIEVING... BUT YOU'VE SAVED MANY OF MY FORESTERS.

OF COURSE. WE'LL BE THERE!

A FEW HOURS LATER.

KATE, MY ANGEL, WAKE UP...

WE'RE GOING TO LEAVE THE HOUSE AND MAKE AS LITTLE NOISE AS POSSIBLE, OKAY?

OKAY.

SO, YOU'RE LEAVING?

?!

50

SWÄNN!

MOM!

I'M SORRY... I... I CAN'T STAY... I NEED TO START OVER. TO LEAVE, GO FAR AWAY... I NEED TO PROTECT MY DAUGHTER.

I DIDN'T MEAN TO SCARE YOU.

I UNDERSTAND, LIZ. NOBODY WILL TRY TO KEEP YOU HERE AGAINST YOUR WILL, YOU HAVE MY WORD.

I JUST WANTED TO TELL YOU THAT I DIDN'T LIE TO YOU TO MANIPULATE YOU, IN THE DESERT... I... I JUST COULDN'T FIND THE WORDS. WARS DEVOUR EEVERYTHING AND DON'T MAKE ANYONE GREAT. FORGIVE ME.

I KNOW, SWÄNN, I KNOW... I WAS UNFAIR. THE PAIN, YOU UNDERSTAND...

YOU'RE A GOOD PERSON, SWÄNN.

TWO DAYS LATER.

WHAT A CITY! THE ARCHITECTURAL STRATA IS SO MUCH MORE VISIBLE HERE THAN IT IS BACK HOME!

THE WATER WILL SOON BE UNDER CONTROL, THE SURVIVORS WILL COME TO REPOPULATE, LITTLE BY LITTLE. WE'LL HAVE TO FIX EVERYTHING, OF COURSE...

THERE'S PABLÖ, AND HÉLÈNE, WHO I TOLD YOU ABOUT!

HÉLÈNE IS GOING TO WORK WITH ME. YOU'LL SEE, SHE'S INCREDIBLE!

ALL THOSE PUMPS DRAINING THE SEINE ARE CRAZY!

WE FOUND TEMPORARY LODGING THAT'S JUST AS COMFORTABLE AS THE OLD HOUSE IN SAINT-OUEN. THANK YOU, SÄTIE, I CAN'T WAIT TO GET TO WORK!

HÉLÈNE, I HAVE SOME BAD NEWS FOR YOU.

?!

52

THE COMPLEX COUNCIL HAD A VOTE. RENAISSANCE'S FUNDING HAS BEEN CUT. WE'RE NOT GOING TO STAY AS LONG AS EXPECTED!

SO, WHEN WILL YOU BE LEAVING?

THREE CENTURIES? THAT'S... THAT'S A LOT, ISN'T IT?

WE'LL BE STAYING FOR THREE CENTURIES INSTEAD OF THE FOUR NECESSARY TO GET THE EARTH BACK IN SHAPE.

?!

YOU CAN BUILD A HOSPITAL IN TWO DAYS! WE'VE BEEN SAYING THAT IN TWO OR THREE YEARS THE PLANET WILL BE STRAIGHTENED OUT!

YOUR RESOURCES ARE EXHAUSTED, YOUR WATERS ARE DEEPLY POLLUTED, YOU HAVE NO WAY OF PRODUCING FOOD TO FEED YOURSELVES. WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO NOT ONLY FIX, BUT CHANGE A GREAT MANY THINGS. YOU SHOULD CHECK YOUR REFERENCES... THREE CENTURIES IS AN EYE FOR A HUMAN, BUT IT'S THE AGE OF MATURITY FOR A TREE!

WE CAME TOO LATE. WELL, THAT'S MY OPINION, AT LEAST. BUT I'M JUST A SIMPLE FORESTER.

IT'S THE END, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS! THE PARIS-BERLIN AXIS IS MEANINGLESS NOW, THE NEW DISTRIBUTION OF THE CARRIER'S PASSENGERS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY REDEFINE A TON OF THINGS, AND, IF YOU WANT MY OPINION, IT'S GOING TO START WITH A SYSTEMATIC ERASURE OF THE WORLD'S BORDERS!

THE BORDERS!... WILL WE EVER KNOW IF THEY SERVED TO KEEP PEACE OR FAVORED WAR?

IN ANY CASE, SEVERAL GREAT NATIONS ARE ON THE POINT OF GIVING UP AND AGREEING TO WORK WITH RENAISSANCE, BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT WE SHOULD CALL THE RAIN OF AMPHIBIANS WHO ARRIVED LAST WEEK...

SINCE THEIR ARRIVAL, NEGOTIATIONS WITH A PANEL OF TERRANS HAVE BEGUN. BUT HOLD ON TO YOUR HATS! WHALES, OCTOPUSES, AND OTHER SPECIES ARE ALSO TAKING PART! WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO TEAM UP WITH THE THINGS WE EAT!...

WE'RE NOT ALONE ANYMORE! WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO SHARE!

LET ME TELL YOU, IN TWENTY YEARS, WE'LL STILL BE TALKING ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF ALL OF THIS!

54

END OF THE FIRST CYCLE.

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